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AUTHOR Gollattscheck, James F.
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ABSTRACT

Community-based education is a concept of rapidly increasing interest and importance to community college educators, finding its way more and more frequently into literature and discussions, yet it is a concept more talked and written about than practiced. A basic reason for the gap between theory and practice is that few institutions have completely thought through and developed an adequate working definition of community-based education. Most colleges have been unwilling to completely rethink their views of postsecondary education. In order to succeed, community-based colleges must give the highest priority to providing for the continuous renewal of the communities they serve through attending to the lifelong learning needs of all community residents. Because of their great diversity, it is impossible to describe all community-based colleges' activities and programs; however, there are common characteristics. Community-based education should be founded on carefully documented needs of individuals, groups, and community institutions; should work with all community components in planning, conducting, and evaluating activities and programs; should be accessible to all community residents; should provide needed competencies and skills for those unserved by traditional credits and degrees; and should willingly adapt instructional methods to the needs of the great diversity of learners. (TE)

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COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION: A NEW DIRECTION FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

James F. Gollattscheck

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Community-Based Education: A New Direction for Community Colleges

The evolution of the comprehensive community college of today from the junior college of the early 1900's has been well documented and is generally well known. It would probably be generally agreed that we are now entering the next phase of that evolution—the era of the community-based community college. While the idea of community-based education has roots reaching far back into the community services movement, several notable dates and activities may be fixed as important steps in its development. The 1969 publications of The Community Dimension of the Community College[1] by Ervin L. Harlacher, Dateline 79: Heretical Concepts for the Community College[2] by Arthur M. Cohen, and Community Services in the Community College[3] by Gunder A. Myran might well be looked on as the true beginnings of the movement from a rather narrow, traditional view of community services toward a type of relationship between college and community in which the college began to work with its community to solve the problems of the community rather than simply serving the community whatever wares it had at its disposal.

1974 might be considered the year that the philosophy of community-based education became clearly articulated and the movement gained significant momentum. The publication

of the article "After the Boom...What Now for the Community Colleges?"[4] by Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., President of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, included the first real definitions of community-based education and gave characteristics of the movement as well as statements of objectives. Dr. Gleazer very eloquently pointed out that the period of growth within which community colleges could do no wrong had come to an end and that we must seriously look to our missions.

In February 1974, Alan Pifer, President of the Carnegie Corporation, delivered the keynote address at the AACJC Convention proposing that objectives often perceived as secondary be given new priority.

> "Other institutions will have a part to play, of course, but I see the community college as the eventual leadership agency. Indeed, I'm going to make the outrageous suggestion that community colleges should start thinking about themselves from now on only secondarily as a sector of higher education and regard as their primary role community leadership."

At that meeting of AACJC community-based education was clearly spelled out as the new thrust of the organization. In April 1974, at the National Conference on Community Services and the Community Colleges sponsored by Valencia Community College, Dr. Gleazer delivered an address entitled "Beyond the Open Door: The Open College." This address was subsequently published in the Community and Junior College Journal.[5] Again, Dr. Gleazer spelled out the need for a re-assessment of the mission of community colleges and proposed

bold steps for community colleges to accomplish their new missions. He gave specific objectives to be accomplished during the remainder of the decade. Another highlight of this very productive and significant year for community-based education was the AACJC National Assembly held in November. The published proceedings of this assembly, A Policy Primer for Community-Based Community Colleges,[6] covered many areas of the movement and pointed out significant directions for the future. An event of continuing significance was the formation of a national consortium of community colleges known as COMBASE. This organization is still active and holds as its mission the promotion of community-based education in community colleges. The most recent activity of COMBASE was the publication of a monograph, Five Community-Based Programs That Work.[7]

In 1977 this writer along with Dr. Ervin Harlacher, Chancellor of the Metropolitan Community Colleges in Kansas City, Miss Eleanor Roberts, Research Associate at the Metropolitan Community Colleges in Kansas City, and Dr. Benjamin Wygal, President of Florida Junior College at Jacksonville, published College Leadership for Community Renewal,[8] a book the authors hope will spur community college educators to give consideration to the needs of their communities and the ways in which colleges and communities can cooperate for effective community renewal.

At the present time community-based education is a concept of rapidly increasing interest and importance to community college educators, a concept finding its way more and more frequently into community college literature and discussion, but a concept as yet more talked and written about than practiced. A basic reason for this gap between theory and practice is that few institutions have completely thought through and developed an adequate working definition of community-based education. Although many definitions of community-based education have come forth since Dr. Gleazer coined the term and although many of these definitions have accurately described or even defined one or more aspects of community-based education, few have captured its total meaning. Most community colleges have not been willing to completely rethink their view of postsecondary education and that is what an understanding and acceptance of community-based education requires.

Community-based education is a concept of postsecondary education totally different from traditional views of post-secondary education. Most who have defined it have been content to take traditional "higher education" and redefine the mission, the content, the students, or the delivery systems involved. One is reminded of the old story of the five blind men who, after a brief exploration, described an elephant. The one who had felt the leg of the elephant described an elephant as being like a tree; the one who had

felt the side said that an elephant is like a wall; while the one who had felt the trunk said that an elephant is more like a snake. Each was right yet all were wrong. In order to define community-based education in its totality and not just describe a leg or a trunk, one must look at it from at least three different points of view. First, it is a philosophy of education and must be so defined. Second, it is a planning system leading to missions, goals, and objectives. Finally, it is a program of educational activities implementing the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution.

The first premise, then, within a definition of community-based education is that it is a philosophy of education, philosophy being defined as a basic purpose or point of view with an underlying set of values. Being community-based necessarily implies a value system for the educational institution. At its simplest level, the value system of the community-based institution places the learning needs of the student above the teaching needs of the institution. This may sound very commonplace at first but when one considers it in the light of all of the history of higher education, it is quite revolutionary. Does one really mean that the college or university is not to decide what to teach? Does one really mean that students can demand to be taught what they want to learn? In the community-based institution the answer is yes! The critics cry, "What? No degrees? No mandatory general education? No graduation requirements?"

The answer is yes in all cases. Yes, for those who want or need them. The difference is that the community-based institution offers alternatives. It recognizes that not everyone needs to learn the same things at the same time in life. Most traditional undergraduate requirements are based on the assumption that a person will receive all of his education during his college days. The community-based institution assumes that learning will be continuous throughout life. General education and other requirements become less important when learning opportunities are available at every point in the individual's life.

The community-based institution recognizes that not everyone wishes or needs a two-year or a four-year degree. It also recognizes that many people do. It further recognizes that even those with degrees need lifelong learning. It places its emphasis and concerns on the issue of learning, not on degrees, credits, and credentials. As Theodore M. Hesburgh commented: "At some point there has to be a realization that the aim of all this education is learning and knowledge, not the degrees gained."[9] In other words, the community-based college delivers the kinds of education community members <u>want</u> and <u>need</u>, not what pedagogues think is good for them.

The community-based college recognizes the community as the life support environment of the individual and that his

well-being is dependent on the well-being of the community. The community, on the other hand, is dependent upon the effectiveness of its individual members. The individual and the community are, therefore, dependent upon each other in a relationship in which both may be mutually strengthened or destroyed. In a situation of rapid change this relationship becomes more vitally important than ever before. The problem of obsolescence and inability to cope with change is not simply a problem of individuals. As people become obsolete and ineffective, entire communities become obsolete and states and regions weaken. It is apparent that many of the major problems facing our communities and our nation are related to the collective inability of individuals to participate as effective citizens in our rapidly changing society. Unfortunately, as social structures weaken and become obsolete, they are less and less able to provide services which improve the ability of individuals to help improve the community; and thus there is developed a vicious cycle of social and individual disability.

The truly community-based community college is dedicated to the proposition that human renewal—the upgrading of every citizen in the community—is its primary and overriding purpose. Accordingly, two strong planks in its philosophic platform are that society is only as great as the individuals who compose it and that, like democracy, society is not an heirloom to be handed down from one generation to another.

Rather, because the conditions of its environment are perennially in flux, society must be recreated by generation after generation so that the costly decay of communities and the wasteful erosion of human resources can be prevented. The community-based college, therefore, gives the highest priority in its value system to providing for the continuous renewal of the community through attending to the lifelong learning needs of all of the community's individuals.

The community-based institution must continuously address itself to the two-fold philosophic and value-loaded question, who should learn what? The appropriate answer to this question is quite clear in terms of the community-based institution. The community-based college recognizes all of the individuals in its community as its potential students. The answer to the question of what the learners should learn is based on another question, what do the learners need to know? What do they need to know in terms of individual needs, community needs, and the needs of the larger environments of the state, nation, and world? The community-based institution adopts as its curriculum those competencies, both knowledges and skills, that its learners need to have in order to be effective, productive citizens in the community, recognizing again that these needs change and that individual renewal is a never ending process.

The final plank in the philosophic platform of community-based education is the relationship between the institution and the community. Ultimately the term "community-based" implies more than anything else a special relationship between the educational institution and the community—a relationship in which the institution determines its direction and develops its programs through interaction with the community. It is a relationship in which the college abandons its traditional role of provider of services for the community and becomes instead a cooperator with the community in providing services for the individuals and institutions within the community.

This new role is one more development in the evolution of postsecondary education. The walls of the medeival university protected knowledge from the intrusion of the world. More modern universities relaxed that tradition somewhat—making knowledge available to those who could afford it or profit from it. The community college made knowledge available to all and even went into the community. For the most part, however, even the most community-oriented colleges took campus-developed programs into the community or provided educator-developed services to the community. A truly community-based college is more than an agency servicing the community; it is a co-participant with the community in the continuous renewal process of the community.

A second aspect of a definition of community-based education deals with the planning processes through which the institution develops its mission, goals, and objectives. Being community-based requires that the community be involved in all steps of planning. In a yet to be published manuscript dealing with community-based education, Max Tadlock writes,

> "No college can call itself community-based until it is ready to step through its own open doors out into the community for mutual guidance, support, and participation. For the college wishing to explore the dimensions and implications of changing from its normal institutional focus to a community focus, the best processes themselves are community-based. They enable the college to contribute to at the same time it draws on community resources to determine what is needed and how best met... Community-Based Planning calls for full partnership of the college, community, business, and other educational and governmental agencies in determining the needs of the community, what roles if any the college should play in fulfilling those needs, and how best these could be accomplished."[10]

For example, Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida, recently went through an intensive self-study in a series of meetings called charrettes. The term, charrette, was brought into popular usage in this country by architects and planners to refer to highly structured brainstorming sessions held to seek solutions to various problems. Many colleges have found the technique useful in seeking solutions to problems of institutions of higher education. At Valencia the charrettes involved students, faculty, classified employees, administration, trustees, and community leaders. The mission statement developed through these charrettes represents one college's attempt to develop a community-based mission

statement. The mission developed at Valencia is as follows:

> The purpose of Valencia Community College is to create a comprehensive learning environment which fosters individual and community growth by providing postsecondary education and continuing lifelong learning opportunities to all.

Every institution must, of course, develop its own mission statement. There would, however, be commonalities in the mission statements of all institutions wishing to be community-based. Such institutions would emphasize openness to all in the community, would reflect a broad array of educational opportunities designed to meet learner and community needs, and would give priority to the development of lifelong learners.

The cooperatively-developed goals of the community-based institution grow out of its mission statement and further define the institution's commitment to working with its community to solve the problems of the community. For a community-based community college such goals would range from the rather traditional goal of providing access to degree programs in higher education for members of the community to the less traditional goal of assisting those individuals in the community who, for many reasons, are not participating members of society to achieve those competencies and skills needed for such participation.

The third aspect of a definition of community-based education relates to the implementation of the institution's missions, goals, and objectives through its programs and activities. The programs and activities of a community-based institution are the visible tip of the iceberg. They are never ends in themselves and it must be remembered that if they are to be viable and longlasting they must rest upon a very solid, supporting base of philosophy, mission, and objectives and must meet valid individual and community needs. The educational programs of community-based institutions will be as varied as the institutions and the communities they serve, for if they are truly community-based they will have been developed through mutual interaction between the institution and its community.

While it would be impossible because of their great diversity to describe the programs and activities of community-based community colleges, there are common characteristics:

- They will be based upon carefully documented needs of individuals, groups, and institutions in the community.
- The college will work with individuals, groups, and institutions in the community in planning, conducting, and evaluating its activities and programs.
- They will be accessible to all in the community who need them.

- They will be based on competencies and skills needed rather than traditional credits and degrees except where such credentials are basic to satisfaction of individual and community learning needs.
- Every attempt will be made to adapt methods of instruction to the needs of the great diversity of learners.

Concern for the three most important elements in community-based education--that of lifelong learning, individual and community renewal, ard competency-based education--is not as new as one might think. In 1959 Margaret Mead observed:

> "When we look realistically at today's world and become aware of what the actual problems of learning are, our conception of education changes radically. Although the educational system remained basically unchanged, we are no longer dealing primarily with the vertical transmission of the tried and true by the old, mature, and experienced teacher to the young, immature, and inexperienced pupil in the classroom...What is needed and what we are already moving toward is the inclusion of another whole dimension of learning: the lateral transmission to every sentient member of society, of what has just been discovered, invented, created, manufactured, or marketed...Is not the break between past and present—and so the whole problem of outdating in our educational system—related to a change in the rate of change? For change has become so rapid that adjustment cannot be left to the next generation. Adults must—not once, but continually—take in, adjust to, use, and make innovations in a steady stream of discovery and new conditions...What we call the lateral transmission of knowledge...is not an outpouring of knowledge from the "wise old teacher" into the minds of young pupils, as in vertical transmission: Rather it is a sharing of knowledge by the informed with the uninformed, whatever their ages. The primary requisite for the learner is the desire to know."[11]

In 1964 John Gardner expressed in his book, Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society, equal concern for the renewal process when he wrote:

> "Unless we attend to the requirements of renewal, aging institutions and organizations will bring our civilization to moldering ruin. Unless we cope with the ways in which modern society oppresses the individual, we shall lose the creative spark that renews both societies and men. Unless we foster versatile, innovative and self-renewing men and women, all the ingenious social arrangements in the world will not help us."[12]

Gardner believed that only individuals are capable of self-renewal and that only as our people are renewed can our social institutions be renewed.

The closing lines from the book College Leadership for Community Renewal sum up the current concern for the lifelong learning opportunities community-based education offers:

> "The world, as we have known it, is coming to an end. Who could have believed that the doomsayers of the fifties and sixties were right about the rapid decline of natural resources and the explosion of population? How were we to prepare for the changes in our society within our life span? The answer is quite simple. We could not have prepared for the issues of change, but we could have been—and must learn to be—ready for change itself. One need only meet a disadvantaged minority person without the skills or abilities to participate in a society that has left him behind, or an elderly citizen subsisting on a pension check which diminishes daily in purchasing power and attempting to live in an environmnet he does not understand, to find people who have already lost most meaningful relationships with society and who perhaps are in danger of losing their identity as complete human beings. They and many others in our communities are in such precarious positions because they are no longer able to cope with a changing environment by changing—that is, renewing—themselves.
>
> "The community renewal college can lead the way in overcoming these inequities. It can provide models, develop exemplary programs, and demonstrate the effect

of renewal to other institutions and agencies in its own community and in others throughout our nation.

"The institution embarking upon such a role recognizes that renewal is a process, not a product. Its task can never be finished, for the concept of completion is the antithesis of renewal. Far from falling victim to disheartenment at the job never finished, the goal never achieved, the system never perfected, and the organization never worthy of permanence, such a college accepts the challenge of coping with the new, adapting to change, bringing an increasing number of citizens into participation in the stimulating events of their times, and helping its community revitalize itself. No educational institution has ever attempted a more stimulating and exciting task—or one more crucial to the very survival of its society."[13]

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FOOTNOTES

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